

Character Class

Dragon Shaman -- Elemental Warrior

By Skip Williams



The *Dungeons & Dragons* game offers a unique take on the dragon -- equal parts intellect, power, majesty, and elemental fury (with a little greed and vanity thrown in for spice). Players thirsty for a taste of draconic might would do well to consider the dragon shaman class from *Player's Handbook II*. The class has a strong dragon theme and lots of great features. Some dragon shamans are merely dragon sycophants obsessed with dragons and more prone to share a dragon's faults than to become a successful adventurer. The best dragon shamans, however, bring a dragon's verve and indomitable will to their adventures. Such characters lift their groups to new heights.



Assets

A dragon shaman has a blend of combat ability and supernatural power that has enormous potential when played well. Here's a look at what the class offers.

- **Good Fortitude and Will Saves:** Dragon shamans use the best progressions for Fortitude and Will saves (see Table 3 -- 1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Dragon shamans usually can avoid or throw off assaults on their bodies or minds.
- **Good Hit Points:** Dragon shamans have 10-sided hit dice. A dragon shaman can absorb plenty of damage when the going gets tough, especially if she has a high Constitution score.
- **Draconic Aura:** Starting at 1st level, a dragon shaman gains the supernatural ability to project an aura of draconic power that gives herself and her allies a boost. The benefit depends on the kind of aura the dragon shaman chooses. Seven different kinds of auras are available, and the dragon shaman knows three of them at 1st level. At every odd-numbered level after that, the dragon shaman learns another aura, until she knows all seven at 9th level.

The various auras can sheathe the dragon shaman and her allies in a protective energy shield, improve melee damage, provide a bonus to interaction skills, provide energy resistance, provide a bonus to perception skills, provide damage reduction, or provide a limited form of the fast healing special quality. The aura has a 30-foot radius and lasts as long as the dragon shaman remains conscious or uses a swift action to change the aura's effect.

The benefit usually comes in the form of a bonus to a roll or check or has another numerical effect as noted in the class description. At 1st level, the bonus from a dragon shaman's aura is +1. The bonus

improves to +2 at 5th level, +3 at 10th level, +4 at 15th level, and +5 at 20th level.

- **Totem Dragon:** At 1st level, a dragon shaman chooses a particular kind of true dragon (a chromatic or metallic dragon from the *Monster Manual*) to emulate. The dragon shaman's alignment limits the choice somewhat (see the section on weaknesses). The kind of true dragon the dragon shaman chooses as a totem dragon adds three class skills to the character's skill list and brings other benefits and limitations discussed elsewhere in this article.
- **Skill Focus:** Starting at 2nd level, a dragon shaman gains Skill Focus as a bonus feat in one of the three class skills provided by the dragon shaman's totem dragon. At 8th level and again at 16th level, the dragon shaman gains Skill Focus in one of the remaining two class skills granted by her totem dragon. If the dragon shaman already has Skill Focus in all the skills from her totem dragon, she gains Skill Focus in one class skill from the dragon shaman class list instead.
- **Draconic Adaptation:** At 3rd level, a dragon shaman learns a spell-like or extraordinary ability associated with her totem dragon. There is one ability for each kind of totem dragon, as shown in the dragon shaman class description. Most of these abilities mimic an ability that allows the totem dragon to get along in its favored environment, such as *water breathing* (several kinds of totem dragons provide this power). Others are abilities that the totem dragon simply uses often, such as *ventriloquism* (associated with blue dragons) or *spider climb* (associated with copper dragons).

Starting at 13th level, the dragon shaman can use a swift action to share her draconic adaptation with all allies within 30 feet.

- **Breath Weapon:** At 4th level, a dragon shaman gains a breath weapon. The breath weapon's shape and composition depends on the dragon shaman's totem dragon. For example, a dragon shaman with a red totem dragon breathes a cone of fire, and a dragon shaman with a bronze totem dragon breathes a line of electricity.

A dragon shaman's breath weapon works exactly like a dragon's breath weapon. The dragon shaman uses a standard action to release her breath weapon. Once the dragon shaman releases a breath weapon, she must wait 1d4 rounds before she can use it again.

A dragon shaman's breath weapon deals 2d6 points of damage at 4th level and an extra 1d6 points for every two additional class levels the dragon shaman gains. The dragon shaman's class level also determines how big the breath weapon is. A cone-shaped breath weapon is 15 feet long at 4th level. The length increases to 30 feet at 12th level and to 60 feet at 20th level. A line-shaped breath weapon is 30 feet long at 4th level. The length increases to 60 feet at 12th level and to 120 feet at 20th level.

- **Draconic Resolve:** At 4th level, a dragon shaman becomes immune to sleep and paralysis effects and to any dragon's frightful presence power.
- **Touch of Vitality:** At 6th level, a dragon shaman's touch can heal wounds (but cannot damage undead). Each day, the dragon shaman can heal damage equal to twice her class level times her Charisma bonus. (If the dragon shaman has no Charisma bonus or has a Charisma penalty, she cannot use this power.) Using this power requires a standard action.

Starting at 11th level, a dragon shaman can channel some of her daily allotment of healing into other beneficial effects such as removing exhaustion, blindness, or negative levels, as noted in the class description.

- **Natural Armor:** At 7th level, a dragon shaman develops a thickened, scaly skin and gains a +1 natural armor bonus (an existing natural armor improves by +1). The dragon shaman gains an additional point of natural armor improvement at 12th level and another point at 17th level.
- **Energy Immunity:** At 9th level, a dragon shaman gains immunity to the type of energy she uses in her

breath weapon.

- **Commune with Dragon Spirit:** At 14th level, a dragon shaman can contact her dragon totem. In effect, this gives her the ability to use a *commune* spell with no material, XP, or focus component. The dragon shaman can ask one question per three class levels. When the dragon shaman uses this power, she cannot use it again for seven days.
- **Draconic Wings:** At 19th level, a dragon shaman grows wings that allow her to fly at a speed of 60 feet with good maneuverability.

Weaknesses

The dragon shaman's powers come at a price. Here are a few things to keep in mind when considering a dragon shaman character:

- **Fairly Low Attack Bonus:** A dragon shaman's base attack bonus is three points every four levels (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). That's a decent base attack bonus but not so great that the dragon shaman can easily hit every foe she faces in battle.
- **Fairly Low Armor Class:** A dragon shaman is proficient only with light and medium armor and with shields (but not tower shields). This gives a dragon shaman a decent Armor Class (especially once the class's natural armor feature kicks in), but not a great one for a character who likes to get into the thick of things.
- **Limited Weapon Options:** A dragon shaman is proficient only with simple weaponry. Having access to the whole category gives the character plenty of weapon choices, but very few really effective choices.
- **Limited Skill Options:** A dragon shaman has a short list of class skills (even with extra skills from her totem dragon) and receives a mere two skill points per level. A dragon shaman can excel at only a handful of skills, though her bonus Skill Focus feats help somewhat.
- **Poor Reflex Saves:** A dragon shaman uses the worst progression for Reflex saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). A dragon shaman isn't so great at avoiding energy attacks or things that cover whole areas, though the Energy Immunity class feature eventually helps against a single kind of energy.
- **Limited Magical Options:** The dragon shaman class grants many potent abilities but no spells. The class offers few opportunities for individuals to fine tune their powers. Once you choose your totem dragon, your ability to customize your abilities is pretty much over.
- **Alignment Restrictions:** A dragon shaman can begin play with any alignment, but the totem dragon's alignment must be similar to her own, as shown in the class description, and that limits the character's choice of totem dragon. Once the dragon shaman chooses a totem dragon, her alignment must remain within one step of the totem dragon's alignment. If the dragon shaman's alignment strays too far, she loses all powers from the dragon shaman class. It's possible for a dragon shaman to choose a new totem dragon that fits her new alignment, but the process requires another dragon shaman's cooperation. See page 18 in *Player's Handbook II* for details.

Playing a Classy Dragon Shaman

You can do fairly well with a dragon shaman simply by charging into combat at every opportunity and blasting away with your breath weapon as often as possible. Playing a truly great dragon shaman requires a little more thought. The following tips will help you make your dragon shaman effective and memorable.

Show Some Draconic Style

Your choice of totem dragon lies at the heart of your class abilities, and it's a good bet that your character spends a great deal of time and energy thinking about and studying the totem dragon. It's a sure bet that at least a little of the totem dragon's personality and habits have rubbed off on the character. Develop a few quirks and tricks that demonstrate your character's connection to her totem dragon. For example, if your totem dragon is gold, you might cultivate a gallant, courtly manner, a penchant for moving about in disguise, or a strong fondness for swimming or searching for submerged treasure.

A little taste of the totem dragon in your character's behavior is a good thing, but you can take this too far. Fanatics make most people nervous.

Be Where Things are Happening

You have the Armor Class and hit points to walk in your party's front rank and set the pace during adventures. Even if front-rank fighting isn't your style, you'll waste your talents unless you put yourself wherever your fellow adventurers are doing their stuff. If you do nothing else, stay close enough to the action to keep your draconic aura power in play. You can be in only one place at a time (usually), so it pays to consider your group's future options as an adventure unfolds. That way, you can be on the scene when something important happens.

Remember Your Friends

Although you're primarily a fighting character, you'll achieve your best results when you work with your allies. Learn to think of your companions as force multipliers for your class features.

Fighting Types: If you have other martial characters in the party such as fighters, rangers, or barbarians, be prepared to share the heavy fighting chores with them. These characters probably have slightly better attack bonuses than you, but you usually can contribute just as much during a fight as they can, especially if you use your class features well. You can give fighting allies a considerable boost with your draconic aura power. The toughness aura can give you and your fighting comrades an extra defensive edge during a long battle. A power aura can help defeat stubborn foes more quickly. Use vigor to keep flagging comrades in the fight.

Your breath weapon can give you and your group a nice edge in a fight. Just be careful where you aim it.

Stealthy Types: Sneaky characters such as rogues and rangers also can benefit from your draconic aura during a battle. These characters benefit from a presence or senses aura when negotiating on the party's behalf or scouting ahead of the group. Sticking close to the party's scouts leaves you in a good position to rescue the scouts when they get in over their heads (which they tend to do with great frequency).

Arcane Spellcasters: Wizards, sorcerers, and bards can pack a real punch with their spells, and they often serve as the party's heavy artillery. These characters are notoriously vulnerable to physical attacks thanks to their poor Armor Classes and low hit points. They need someone to keep the opposition at a distance, and you can do that very well. Try to position yourself between the enemy and your spellcasting allies, and be ready to double back and attack any foe that manages to slip past you.

Also be prepared to work in concert with your spellcasting allies when attacking groups of foes. Your breath weapon, used along with area-affecting spells, can provide a deadly one-two punch. It's best if the spells don't use the same kind of energy as your breath weapon. That way, a foe who's immune or resistant to one attack will still suffer the full effect of the other one.

Divine Spellcasters: Get friendly and stay friendly with your party's cleric, druid, or paladin. This character's healing spells can keep you on your feet when you take damage. Your vigor and touch of vitality powers can duplicate some of these characters' most important medicinal spells, but it's better to treat these powers as a supplement for the support a divine spellcaster can provide rather than as a replacement for it. As a fighting

character, your time during a battle is best spent attacking the foe. Save your healing powers for those times when you simply must intervene to save a comrade's life or help your party recover more quickly after a fight is over. Keep in mind, also, that divine spellcasters have spells that can deal some real hurt to an enemy. Stepping in to heal an ally while a cleric or druid uses an offensive spell might be the best way to win a fight. Work with your party's divine spellcasters before a fight begins to decide how to get the best results for your group.

Some Key Equipment

Your class abilities make you powerful, but you still need the right mix of gear to survive adventuring. Here are the basics.

- **Armor:** As a fighting character, you need all the Armor Class you can get. Buy the best medium armor and shield you can afford. At the start of your career, that probably means scale mail and a heavy shield (unless you plan to use a two-handed weapon). Move up to chainmail or a breastplate as soon as you can. A *ring of protection* is a good addition to your array of defensive gear, because its effects stack with your armor and with your natural armor bonus. It also improves your touch Armor Class.
- **Primary Melee Weapon:** Your proficiency with simple weaponry doesn't give you many options. A heavy mace or morningstar is a good choice for a one-handed weapon. If you favor a two-handed weapon, a spear or longspear are about your only choices. Neither weapon deals more base damage than a heavy mace or morningstar, but if you have a Strength bonus of +2 or more, a two-handed weapon can help you get the most from it. In addition, you can throw a spear if you feel the need, and a longspear gives you extra melee reach.
- **Backup Melee Weapon:** Always have a light weapon or two handy. A light slashing weapon, such as a dagger or hand axe, can help get you out of a tight spot (such as being swallowed whole by a big monster). It also pays to have a hefty weapon on hand in case you lose your primary weapon or find that it isn't effective. Make sure this weapon deals a different kind of damage than your primary weapon. For example, if you normally use a heavy mace (a bludgeoning weapon), consider shortspear (which deals piercing damage) as a backup.
- **Ranged Weapon:** Your foes won't always stay within melee reach or in range of your breath weapon (and remember that your breath weapon isn't available every round). A light crossbow deals good damage and has a decent rate of fire. You might also consider a heavy crossbow. It's deadly but slow to reload.
- **Miscellaneous Gear:** You can derive considerable benefit from items that boost your ability scores, even temporary items such as potions. A Strength boost improves your attack bonus and damage potential. Dexterity improves your personal defense and initiative score (great for hitting a foe with a quick breath weapon when a fight begins). A Constitution boost improves the saving throw DC for your breath weapon and gives you a few extra hit points (and a better Fortitude save). A permanent Charisma boost improves your touch of vitality power.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

©1995-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Based on the original **Dungeons & Dragons®** game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and on the new edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison. **D&D**, **Dungeons & Dragons**, and **Forgotten Realms** are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All Wizards characters, character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This material is protected under the laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction of or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. This Wizards of the Coast game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 System License, please visit **www.wizards.com/d20**. ©2001-2006 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. Made in the U.S.A.

Visit our website at www.wizards.com/dnd